



銀盤 銀盤 カルトコラ

vol.1

ショート・プログラム: Road to dream

海原 零
イラスト/鈴平ひろ

D
スードタッジ



ショート・プログラム: Road to dream

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スポーツダッシュ

Ginban Kaleidoscope - Volume 01 Chapter 00-02

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Novel Illustrations

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Prologue

Tazusa will teach you sweetly! (heart)

The Foundations of Figure Skating

To my dear readers, hello there. Getting right to it, the most kaleidoscopic (?) woman, Sakurano Tazusa will teach you the foundations of a sport that is not only refined, but also fantastic: figure skating! Are you ready?

First is the length of the performance. In women's singles, the short program must be no longer than two minutes, forty seconds. The free program must be four minutes long, give or take ten seconds.

In the short, you have to skate three jumps, three spins, two steps (and within that also should be a spiral sequence). You have to skate a program that includes all eight of these required elements.

In the free program, you can pretty much do whatever you like, but in order to have a well-balanced program, you should keep these jumps and spins in mind. You'll also be graded on expressiveness and artistry. About the song you use, excluding ice dancing, you can't use songs that have vocals. In terms of program music, there is a standard acceptance of using high frequency music, and sometimes a fad will emerge, and it's a splendid effect. Figure skating also has that kind of enjoyment.

Next, we move on to jumps. Basically, there are six different types of jumps: the axel, the Lutz, the flip, the loop, the Salchow, and the toe loop. I would like to compare them in the order of difficulty, but more or less, they generally also differ in terms of the number of rotations. Of course, each skater has their strengths and weaknesses, and there are exceptions to what I'm about to explain. To distinguish the jumps... well, if you already know them, you already know them, but explaining them all would be a pain, so if you'd like, watch some figure skating. Sometimes, learning it by practicing on your own is good, too. I think you'll get it. *giggle* But I guess that would be mean to those of you that actually bought this book, so I guess I'll explain the axel. Wait, what? There's no more space left on the page? So I guess it's to be continued in volume two!

Don't get me wrong, okay? Have a good one!

- The rules I've introduced here may differ slightly from the official rules of figure skating. Please think of them as the rules that apply in Ginban Kaleidoscope.

Prologue[edit]

The Figure Skating Grand Prix Series, Skate America.

A stylish singles skater with supreme beauty suffered ultimate defeat by coming tenth out of twelve people.

Of course that's me, and at official interviews and whatnot, there's no way I would be prepared. But now, I'm surrounded by a crowd of people and I hate it.

Almost everyone is Japanese. Normally, I wouldn't even notice them, these reporters for the sports section of the common press. Up until last year, they wouldn't have even thought of gathering at the ice arena in Colorado.

Once every four years, such a phenomenon is born, or so I hear. "Olympic Season" is basically what you'd call this coming winter.

"Sakurano-senshu, a word about the results of this competition."

"It's a pity that I'm unable to advance to the finals. After all, I wanted to win."

The reporters' reactions were just as I had expected.: "I don't really understand, but whatever." That was the expression on most of their faces.

"And what about your result - tenth out of twelve?"

"It is just as I said a moment ago."

These reporters don't even have the guts to ask me simply, "What are the finals?" When I glanced around surreptitiously, the guy who had just asked me the question turned to the fellow next to him and whispered, "Forgive me for asking, but what are the finals?"

Even if you try to be discreet, I can totally hear you. I scoffed.

"How is the effect on the Olympic selection?"

"There's someone who has been disadvantaged for the selection."

Answers that were even more careless and irresponsible than I had imagined. There's definitely *someone* who's being disadvantaged.

"Shitou-senshu will be participating in the German competition. Does that bother you?"

"No, since I prefer to focus on myself."

Ah, I screwed up. I said such a typical thing, and now I'm being lumped with the dull inside of the vehicle that is before my eyes.

"But it surely must bother you. Or perhaps you only think it doesn't?"

The scolding face of General Manager Mishiro floated into a corner of my mind. And not to mention Coach Takashima's perplexed face.

It doesn't matter in terms of the former, but in terms of the latter, I'll have to think of some excuse. Maybe that I was in the worst mood I've ever been in in my life. Well, in reality, it did turn out like this, so let's say that I wasn't feeling well.l.

"In today's free program, you had four misses. Any thoughts on that?"

"You can't do anything about a fall that already happened. In order to not drag out such a thing, you just have to overcome your own heart. Also, I had five misses, not just four."

When I answered the question once, the atmosphere of the moment became rather dangerous.

But there's nothing I could have done. I wanted to hurry back to my hotel, forget about everything, and just sleep, but in that dim passageway, it was like I was a celebrity who had been caught having an affair. Can't you ask more sensible questions, at least?

"What was the reason for your crushing defeat?"

...Thank you very much. Finally, you're being sensible and not beating around the bush.

"I do not think there was one specific reason for my defeat. I suppose today was just an unlucky one. I do think that it echoed my late start in the short yesterday, though."

"I believe things turned out the same way during last season's World Championships. Are you doing any sort of mental training?"

Well, you made me think of something really boring. You seem to have done some preliminary research, at least.

"I don't do anything special. I don't think you can get efforts from mental preparation, either..."

Ah, suddenly this became really annoying. Once I answer the next question, I'm going to cut the interview short. I'll go back to the hotel, take a shower, and go right to sleep.

"I have heard this before, but you never smile during a performance. Why?"

"...Because technically I guess I'm inexperienced. Skating while smiling is so much harder than you think it is."

To be honest.....that's not quite how I truly feel.

I - Forced Unison

I - Forced Unison[edit]

Figure Skating Women's Singles Athlete Profile--

Sakurano Tazusa

Born September 10, 1989, in Tokyo

First-year student at Saint Toulard Girls' School

Age: 16 years

Height: 158 cm

Regular rink: Tokyo Crystal Garden

Began lessons at the above rink in 1994

Hobbies: anime appreciation, collecting [comics](#)

Coach: Takashima Yuuji

Principal Past Achievements

And then, heading into the Olympic season.

2005, early November, the first of the Grand Prix Series, Skate America, 10th place.

To get this result in a competition that will influence the selection of representatives is definitely painful.

Returning to Japan with a disappointed feeling...

Early morning practice, commuting to school with my bag in one hand, then after school, more practice. These sorts of everyday things began again.

Compared to America, Japan has not yet developed a system that takes athletes' responsibilities into consideration so they can balance it with their schoolwork.

There are provisions for overlooking various things, but though I may be an Olympic candidate, I'm still stuck with having to take the regularly scheduled exams.

I, Sakurano Tazusa-sama, studying for school? Yes, exactly. Don't be stupid.

The sister's solemn organ playing reverberates through the school church. Everyone in school is standing and singing the harmonies of the hymn.

Right now, I am staring at the boring first page, with the logo of our Catholic school. In such a situation, falling asleep would be impossible, even for me--

"....."

Huh? What is this? I hear somebody's voice. It's not a singing voice, either.

<Scuse me a sec.>

It's a male voice. I stopped singing and shot a glance around the room... as expected, all women. This is an all-girls school, after all. No way you'd hear a man's voice here. It's just my imagination.

<Hey, can I...>

"Who's there?!"

No doubt about it. Someone is unbelievably close right now. Filled with confusion, I looked all around me in a circle, but the ten closes people to me just stared at me with annoyed faces.

Their gazes carry the accusation of "What are you doing before God?"

"Tazusa, what's wrong?"

See now! The girl whispering from my right. The one person you could call my close friend, an ice mate from the same rink, Honjou Mika.

"Haha... nothing really. Just an auditory hallucination..."

<It's not a hallucination.>

Mika's mouth drops open, and everyone else around me does the same. The only one who can hear this voice... is me?

I covered my ears, but still--

<Um...>

"Would you..."

Even in this echoing space filled by the hymn, for some reason I can still hear it

clearly.

<Excuse me...>

"Quiet! Shut up!"

Sigh.

The curtain of sound that wrapped the church disappears.

The holy melody supposed to be offered up to God, and the consciousnesses of 40 members of the class--

All focus on me.

"Sakurano-san?"

The Sister who had probably been playing the organ, under the guidance of the Lord, asked about my damnable actions. Holding in her anger, deeply compassionate to the end.

"Ah, I'm sorry. It's just that..."

How do I explain?

In the again-quiet church, I feel completely alone.

"...Tazusa..."

Aside from the worried Mika, everyone else distanced themselves from me. Probably manifestations of the contempt and fear reserved for non-believers.

...But why? Why only me?

<Hey, please...>

"Wawawawa!"



Unconsciously grabbing my head, I shake it from side to side as if possessed by something--

"Sakurano-san!"

Ignoring the Sister's reprimand, I check in all directions, including above and below.

<Um, so...>

"Someone's playing a prank!"

A boy's voice whispering by my ear. There's nobody there, so why?

I begin to panic--

<No, it's not a prank...>

"I don't believe this! What is this!"

I start stomping on the sacred floor with both feet and shouting indiscriminately, filling every corner of the wide church with echoes.

Really, what in the world.....ah.

Could it be--

"Sakurano-san! Get a hold..."

"The one who needs to get a hold on herself is you! You may try to brainwash me, but it won't work! You fake-Sister!"

"Wh....."

The expression on the Sister's face, whose mouth is hanging permanently half-open, is the shock of someone who is accused of an unremembered sin. Incidentally.....there's also the anger at being called a fake.

My conjecture was wrong. Then what--???

<Please, Tazusa.....>

"Now it's in English--?"

.....just then. I first realize.

The voice is coming from inside my head--

*

The floor is covered with a complicated, interweaving pattern of white and gray. This school's sacred.....

Bathroom--

Entering the private space enclosed on all four sides, I take a deep breath. Once more.....alright.

".....so? In a word, what are you?"

I am alone in the enclosed space. But, decidedly.....I am not simply talking to myself.

<I'm not a bad person. I don't mean any harm...>

"That doesn't help me understand at all!"

Quickly, my temper explodes.

".....why I can hear your voice. Explain that, if you please."

.....really, I might be going crazy. Since it seems a strange guy has taken up

residence in my head.

<I get it. Please, just calm down.>

What's certain is that he's a foreigner proficient in Japanese. Pronunciation and accent are both pretty good. A voice probably yet to deepen, a little scratchy, somewhat sweet.....and so what?

"You'd better hurry and talk while I'm calm. If you value your life..."

"Hey, Tazusa! Are you alright?"

.....Mika? Since when has she been in front of the door?

Secluding myself in the bathroom and letting out my hysterics.....I wonder what she thinks of me.

"Mika, what about class?"

"You were acting strangely, so I also asked for time to go to the bathroom. More importantly, just what is wrong?"

.....this is a problem. How should I explain? When I don't even know what's going on myself.

"Tazusa?"

"Well.....you see. Explaining would take a long time...or not really, but how should I say this....."

As I keep changing around like a broken radio, my blood pressure rises--

"I don't know either!"

My head's about to explode--!

".....Tazusa."

.....I take a deep breath. Calmly, as if I am on the ice, about to begin a performance.

"Sorry, Mika. I'll be fine in a moment, so please let me be alone."

.....now then.

"It's alright now. Let's continue. I'll have you know I'm not a patient person."

<OK, I said I get it.>

As if guessing that my patience is already at its limits, "he" hurriedly begins to explain.

<To begin with the conclusion, I myself am already dead. But, my soul was incomplete and unable to ascend to heaven, so, as you see, it has possessed you.>

".....huh?"

<I guess you could call it spirit-fusion.....>

.....I rush to reclaim my slipping sense of reality.

"A ghost in these days? How stupid."

<Then how do you explain this situation?>

".....how?"

Possessed by a soul.....he says, but the stranger it is, the less frightening it becomes.

A sweet voice like an anime voice actor. He seems younger than I am. Well, he doesn't seem like a bad guy.....

"Alright, let's suppose you're right. When will you be leaving?"

<.....don't get angry and just listen to me.>

"I *will* get angry!"

From his opening, it's obvious it's going to be bad.

"Now, tell me straight out. How long do you plan on being a hindrance to me?"

<A hindrance? That's a bit...>

"How. Long?"

<Hya... one hundred...>

"100 days.....?"

The meaning of silence is, yes.

".....no. I won't accept it. Get out right now!"

<If I were able, I would have done it long ago.>

"This sucks!"

Filled with panic, I unconsciously grab my head.

.....it only seems natural that my head belongs to me. But some weird foreign boy has settled there.

If I were to see a doctor..... Surgery? Psychiatry? Or perhaps gynecology?

For something like this, where should I turn to?

<First, I'd like to tell the details of how this happened. Will you listen?>

"....."

.....fine, just start talking already.

Thus I command him, silently, but there's no reaction.

"You.....so you can't hear my thoughts?"

<Yeah, it seems that way.>

.....you idiot, brat, pervert, @#&^*!!

".....I see. It appears to be true."

<Eh?>

"Nothing."

If even my thoughts were known in detail, then I would truly have zero privacy. I would have to drag this guy out even if it meant drilling my head.

"So? Get on with it."

<OK. First of all, my name is Pete Pumps. I'm Canadian.>

.....as he says that, to guess from his sweet voice, his outward appearance would probably be something like this.....

"Stop it!"

<.....wh-what?>

"Nevermind. More importantly, no matter how I think about it, I don't remember anything about having to be possessed by a Canadian ghost."

<Probably not. But it seems there was no one else whose wavelength matched mine as well as yours. Even searching the entire world.>

.....what lamentable bad luck.

"Wait a minute. You say 'it seems'. Did someone say that?"

<Umm, it wasn't really 'someone' per se. It's just that when you become an existence like this, you come to know various things without needing to be taught by anyone. It's hard to explain in words...>

"Don't make fun of me!"

<I'm not making fun of you. It's mysterious to me as well.>

.....alright. Forget all of my emotions, I need to accept reality.

"So, when did you die?"

<5 days ago. Usually you live in Tokyo, in a place not far from here, but 1 week ago, you happened to go to America.....>

"Could it be.....Colorado?"

<Yup. There was a lot of snow falling, but straight below that, was me.>

.....come to think of it, on the day I left, snow was falling nearby.

"Oh, congratulations. Then, rather than possessing me, go on and rest in peace."

After saying that, I regret it a little. Whatever else, congratulations are out of place.

<.....like I said, that's...>

"I know. Tell me why."

Since however I might rant and rail, it seems nothing will change.

<Well, somehow I understand the reason.>

As if guarding against his listener's temper, his words speed up.

<It seems the powerful energy of the snow caused my soul to begin breaking up...>

"Speak a little slower."

<Sorry. Umm.....so then. As I am now, I began wandering this world. In special circumstances like this, you transfer for a fixed period of time into someone whose spiritual wavelength or environment matches yours. Until your soul recovers.>

"And that takes 100 days?"

<So it seems.>

.....somehow, I feel like I'm being tricked. But I really can hear this boy Pete's voice in my head, so.....

"Do dead people who are hit by the snow all end up like this?"

<No, if you include the entire world, cases like this apparently only happen once every 10 years.>

I suddenly want to swear loudly, but.....I'll leave that to later.

"So, how old are you?"

<16. Same as you. I told you, our wavelengths match.>

*

Ending my conversation with Pete for the time being, I open the door of the bathroom and.....

The Sister whom I earlier called a fake in the middle of class is standing in my way.

"Sakurano-san! Cell phones are prohibited in this school. Give it to me. It is being confiscated."

.....haha. I can't take it anymore.

"Come on. Now."

"I don't have a cell phone."

"You're lying. You were talking to someone in the bathroom. I could hear it all."

.....how am I supposed to explain?

That I was intruded upon by a Canadian ghost named Pete?

I am seriously about to snap.

"I understand. Then, please search me."

".....what did you say? You've probably just hidden it somewhere..."

"I don't mind if you look around for it until you're satisfied. Although, I wonder where in this narrow bathroom you would look."

I certainly have no ill intent toward the stern Sister standing before me, and it's natural that she misunderstood. Even so, she's perfect for venting my anger.

"While we're at it, why don't you undergo a body search along with me, Sister? Even if we find a matchbook from a host club, I won't mind."

".....Sakurano-san! You are such a--!"

Ahh, now I've done it. Sakurano Tazusa's first suspension from school? Looks like it.

But really, I don't care anymore.

*

The place is [Koutou Ku](#). Next to a certain forested park along Tokyo Bay, stands a white-painted, high-class residence.

It is a 2-storey building with extravagant Western architecture. The plot, surrounded by deep green trees, is large, and the fountain in the garden continuously creates a little rainbow.

Beyond the white-painted gate that is hung with golden ornaments, in the middle of the entryway has been set up a round flowerbed full of colorful flowers, designed to force people to walk around it like a roundabout.(!) That's

how I would describe it, but.....did we ever have visitors deserving of such a thing?

"I'm home."

That's right. This is my home base.

The residence of Coach Takashima Yuuji.

He is the very one who recognized my talent and invited me into this world, but at his age he is still a wealthy bachelor. Given his age of a little over 40, he's just about my parents' generation. Owing to that, he is often mistaken for such.

Slightly longish hair and a moderately handsome face. His eyes seem to droop a little at the corners, and he has a good-intentioned but indecisive personality. Although a decent attempt to make himself look younger, his mustache reveals his true age. I don't think it's necessary anyway, but I can't compliment him by telling him it actually looks good.....

For a figure skater, the effect of the training environment is large. The distance from the Takashima house to my regular rink, Tokyo Crystal Garden, is a 3 minute walk.

Early morning, and afternoon. Basically, in order to manage 2 practices every day, one can't ignore geography. Many skaters end up living near skating rinks with clubs.

In my case, I was born in Nagano, but my father could not leave there due to his work, so.....ever since I joined the club when I was 5 years old, I have been under Coach's care.

Last year, happily my parents divorced, my father already remarried, and I don't plan on seeing him again. The direct reason for the divorce seems to be that my mother, who is a mountain climber, was rarely at home. Most likely, even now she is working hard to conquer some mountain somewhere. Consequently, she is a woman whose whereabouts are untraceable throughout the year. In its own way, that's a relief to me as a daughter.

Compared to other sports, figure skating is particularly expensive, so it is difficult to stick with for those without recognized genius. Of course, in my case, given my beauty and talent since birth, and the fact that my parents' families were economically well-off, there were no difficulties in my starting figure skating. Excluding having to leave my parents even before entering elementary school.....

"Oh, Tazusa. You're late. Did you get failing marks and end up with supplementary lessons again?"

"I am not like you. The Sister was just in a bit of a bad mood."

.....well, somehow I managed to get away with just a reprimand and an admonishment.....

"My condolences. At this rate, won't you have problems advancing a grade? Instead of the Olympic representative's seat, it would be wiser to worry about whether in April next year, there will be a seat for you in the second-years' classroom."

.....and, having casually made such nasty remarks, with the sound of pattering feet, she bursts outside.

This cheeky, slant-eyed shorty is my sister, Sakurano Youko. Don't be surprised, but she's actually 9 years old.

Since 4 years ago, she has lived at the Takashima house same as me, and is enrolled in the figure skating junior class. By virtue of being my little sister, she seems to have good muscles.....

<Hey, she's rather cute, isn't she.>

".....if you say something stupid like that again, I'll kill you."

In order to silence Pete, I ascend the spiral stairs from the lobby to the 2nd floor. I enter my room and toss my bag. Now, practice. I should change into my sweats and wash my school uniform--

"Wait a minute....."

At that moment--

A frightening truth flickered by.

I didn't ask for all the details, but.....

"Tell me honestly. Perchance do you.....see what I am seeing?"

<.....ah, actually...>

"Actually what!"

.....wait, just wait. Calm down, Tazusa. Does this mean the boy living in my head shares my sense of sight?

<Well, um, Tazusa.....>

No, probably not just my sense of sight. Hearing, smell, taste.....even touch?

.....which means!

<Listen...>

"Noooo!"

A sudden repulsive thought circulates through my imagination, and I thrust my forehead between my palms.

<Tazu...>

"This isn't funny! I absolutely won't allow it! Get away from me, you pervert!"

I try to shout this at the inside of my head, but I can only turn diagonally upwards. But, being unusually panicked, I pull my hair and run around the room as I continue to scream.

"You piece of trash! Get out! Disappear!"

<I already told you, it's impossible...>

"I don't want to hear excuses! Now, whatever it takes, get out!"

An instinctive action. I bang my head on the wall--

"Ouch....."

<Ow! Ss.....>

.....I see sparks in both eyes, and stagger. The pain echoes to the core of my being.

<Whatever the circumstances, that was too cruel...>

"To whom, now?!"

My forehead feels like it's burning where it hit the wall. I still can't open both eyes all the way. I have to admit it was stupid, but, if we share the sense of pain, in addition to everything else, then.....

"All right. If that's how it is, I will chase you out, by whatever method necessary."

<Why are you so determined?>

"Don't joke with me! Why do I have to let some boy I don't even know watch me while I'm changing?"

.....no, it's not just that. This and that--

<Then change while covering your eyes...>

"Your leaving is easier!"

Now, what is he going to do. Of various means for tearing out a possessing spirit..... I know nothing. So, for now.

I descend a storey. Going straight to the kitchen, I open a cupboard.

As expected, it's scary, but.....

<Oi... no way!>

"Yes way! You better be prepared!"

Gazing at the small red bottle in my hand, I take a deep breath--

<Stop.....!>

".....ee, gyaaaaaaaa!"

I lose awareness, but even with the unimaginable spicyness, I am not allowed the mercy of passing out.

"W... wadah, water.....!"

".....Tazusa?"

Turning my head sideways and putting my mouth around the faucet, I turn the

water to full blast in one go. Of course, the raging pain doesn't disappear in the slightest.....

"Oi. Are you listening?"

".....guh, bwuh?"

"What are you doing?"

.....as my awareness returns to normal, the shame begins to rise. I didn't think I would be seen.....

But, there's no way I can pull my mouth away from the faucet.

"Tazusa!"

"Gha, ghis is... bwah...!"

Ahh!

.....what a disgraceful sight. As a result of trying to talk while gulping down as much water as I can, water came rushing out of my nose.

With bad timing, Coach Takashima comes home. Even though he's supposed to be conducting lessons for the junior class right now.

"For a joke this is..."

"That's not it! If I don't drink water, ack..."

Seeking to explain, I interrupt the treatment and raise my face, but I can't stand it and go back.

".....did you drink this?"

Still holding the faucet in my mouth, I try nodding.how extremely unsightly I must look!

"Is there another skater in the world who would gulp down tabasco just because her results were a little bad?"

I thoroughly wash out my mouth again and try to look up as seriously as possible, but..... I falter a little at Coach's serious expression.

"There are some realities one absolutely can't explain."

Responding jokingly, I wipe my wet face and chest with my sleeve and pick up

the towel nearby. The burning in my throat has finally begun to lessen.....

.....wait, what about *him*?

Since a little while ago, I haven't heard his voice. I try knocking on the side of my head with my right first.

".....yes! Take that, heheh!"

Success. I chased out the weird ghost.

".....are you alright?"

"Yes... it's nothing. I was just exterminating a big parasite..."

<Who are you calling a parasite?>

"Gyaaaa!"

Grabbing my head, I jump up.

.....why? Didn't I chase him out?

"Tazusa..... what's wrong, really?"

"No, um..... nothing's wrong. Just a slight change in mental state..."

"I beg you, don't joke around."

Even the always-kind Coach Takashima is seriously angry. But, I'm absolutely not joking around.

"How should I say this. I know..."

<What does it look like? What are you doing all of a sudden, you worthless teakettle!>

".....worthless teaket....."

"Nn?"

Coach's dubious reaction doesn't even make it to my awareness. The rage that had begun to fade revives once more.

"What! You perverted Canadian!"

I planned on spouting some more sharp insults, but at that moment.....

"P... perverted Canadian?"

<I thought I was going to die!>

"Yes, well! Even though you should have died, I failed to kill you. Shall I try again?"

"Why...!"

I grab the tabasco bottle again.....

<S-sorry. It was my bad!>

"Then, get out right now!"

<No, that's a separate.....>

"Why me?"

.....I finally realize the problem.

Even when I'm saying it to Pete, I have to speak normally. Though I didn't mean to, I seem to have ended up involving Coach, who's standing there in front of me.....

"No. I wasn't speaking to you, Coach. That is....."

"Why am I a perverted Canadian..."

"No, I'm telling you..."

<Pw...>

"You shut up!"

.....ah. I did it again.

Kind, kind Coach is looking at me all flustered. It's too late. Things have become incredibly complicated.....

"Is it Olympics stress?"

".....eh?"

I'm caught off guard by the unexpected words..... then I understand. So that's how it's been interpreted. Ahaha.....

".....forgive me. For not noticing."

"No, that's not it..."

"Take a break from practice for a while. Go somewhere and go all out..."

I grab both of Coach's arms.

As a basic matter, I don't care what others think of me, but for this person to worry about me..... it just becomes more trouble later.

"Really. That's not it. I'll head to practice right away."

".....Tazusa, did something happen?"

"It's honestly something else. Please believe me."

My total stubbornness dates a long ways back--

This person doesn't have the pluck to meddle too much when facing an insistent opponent like me.

".....I understand. I beg you, don't push yourself too hard."

"Yes....."

Ah~~ I've acted out one of those "family bonds"-derived dramas that I hate.

"Ah, yes. I almost forgot my errand."

.....from his shocked expression and tone, it doesn't take imagination to figure out what the matter is.

"If this is about my being scolded by the Sister, there's no problem. An unfortunate misunderstanding escalated, that's all."

One of the lovely features of my school. Even in the case of a little bit of instructive guidance, the time it takes for word to reach the guardian is surprisingly short.

"If that's the case, then fine."

Showing me a smile at the end, Coach returns to the rink.....

Enclosed by light blue walls, this is my room.

To hear Youko's take, the bookshelves full of comics and anime DVDs spoil the room's originally somewhat high-class feel.

I glare straight-on at the full-length mirror in my room. Of course, the target is not myself.....

<You really are quite a beauty.>

Unconsciously, my face begins to slacken.....and I hurriedly look away from the mirror.

Flattery is for Snow White.

"Appeasing me with flattery won't work."

<That's not it. I'm telling the truth.>

.....this is what Western guys are like.

But, well. Pete's words certainly aren't lip service.

Glossy long black hair tied back in 2 deep red ribbons. Bangs slightly parted in 2 strands, hanging down to just above my eyelashes but here and there flying up as if repelled by my forehead, making them seem light and bouncy.

A slightly-less-than-average height of 158cm, slightly-longer-than-average arms and legs, and a long, slender neck.

The features of an elegant face, the tapered bridge of my nose, sharply angled eyebrows, thin small mouth and lips, radiant white skin.

My half-lidded eyes conceal their original large size, giving others a sleepy or dry impression, but the reason that becomes a slightly negative factor is that I am simply too beautiful.....



"Incidentally, could you share with me any ideas for protecting that beauty from the eyes of beasts?"

<.....how about using a towel as a blindfold?>

.....with a deep red towel, I completely seal off my sight.

Carefully, taking care not to touch anywhere strange, I take off my uniform. After the blouse, I unhook my skirt and am left in my underwear. Along with the coolness, I feel strangely helpless. Why am I even.....

"Screw this!"

<.....eh?>

Ahh, this really sucks!

To an observer, I probably seem 100% a deviant. I want to cry just thinking about it.

Tokyo Crystal Garden Ice Rink--

The rink is set up inside a building that appears elliptical from above. Oblong windows line side walls that are a coordinated brilliant light blue. The blue roof which swells out into a slightly domed shape, coupled with the interweaving facade, looks quite stylish. At night, light spilling from the windows illuminates the surrounding trees, offering a scene you could call fairy-tale-like.

On Saturdays and holidays, it's open to the general public from noon until midnight, and club practice is only in the morning. Other than that, it's available all day. Compared to other clubs which have times during which classes have priority, the treatment is a blessing.

There are 20 students. The male-female ratio is 8 to 12. Aside from the 2 ice dance couples, all the rest are singles skaters.

And, as for this rink's ace, it goes without saying.....

"Tazusa."

.....from the meek expression of my close friend and ice mate, Honjou Mika, I gather that someone has told her something.

"Is it true that the Sister decided to fail you?"

".....um, Mika."

Of course, she is truly worried. This girl's greatest and single fault.....

"Why do always believe all that nonsense?"

"It's not true?"

"There's no way that idiot would be telling the truth."

Mika puts a hand to her chest in relief. Of course, in my best friend's pure heart, there are no lies.

"From Youko-chan's story, it seemed to be true, so....."

"You really must be Takashima-descended."

In times like these, that's what I call her.

Because we live together, the one who gets mistaken for Coach's daughter is me, but from a personality perspective, Mika is the one who by far seems to be related.

"But you really were acting strangely at school today."

"I know. I promise I will resolve it before the day is over."

".....eh?"

"Oh nothing."

Dodging further questions, I step onto the ice and begin to skate--

<Hey, you're pretty good.>

.....even though I told him not to speak, this guy.

Well, I can't respond to him here.

After all, there are a lot of junior skaters around who look at me with admiration. Even if I make mistakes, I can't act stupid.....

<It feels good. This is the first time I've ever skated like this...>

"It's not as if you're the one skating!"

.....I guess I am rather stupid.

At my side, a juniors boy startled by my sudden, unexplained shouting misses his jump and falls.

For a moment, I think to apologize, but it will just mire me deeper. I begin skating again as if nothing happened, but.....I confirm the concerned glance of Coach Takashima who, while hurrying over to the junior skater who seems to have landed hard on his butt, nonetheless also worries about his idiotic Olympic candidate.

<I told you, I share your sense of touch. So it feels no different from skating myself.>

.....dangerously, I am again near exploding.

<It feels like riding on a roller coaster...>

"Shut up....."

I command quietly.

To avoid being suspected of drug-induced hallucinations, I need to be careful of any more eccentric behavior.

I finish warming up. Now then--

From back skating, I create a little build-up, then a double Axel (2 and a half rotations).

<Wah, awesome!>

".....what are you saying, this is nothing."

Although I still feel irritated, I toss off my answer coolly.

<It really resounds through your legs, doesn't it.>

"Well yes."

A jump puts many times a skater's body weight onto the edge of the skates. If you don't train your ankles and knees, you won't be able to withstand the impact of landing.

Next, I point my toes 180 degrees apart and, while leaning my body obliquely back, I skate an arc.....

"Oh, a spread eagle? Not bad."

I think I might begin shouting again, but..... slight curiosity takes precedence.

"You know figure skating?"

<Yes, well. In Canada, figure skating comes right after ice hockey, after all.>

Come to think of it, that's true.

"Canadian spectators are famous for their inconsistent favoritism towards locals, was it?"

<Nothing of the sort! We Canadians fairly applaud any athlete who gives a good performance.>

.....it seems even as a ghost, he is bothered by bad-mouthing his mother country. At least, I've added to my ways of relieving stress.

*

Finished with practice, now for a slightly late dinner.

Today, I am in charge of cooking. Normally Coach does it, but I don't feel right making him do everything, so occasionally he lets me do it.though to be honest, Coach's cooking is several times tastier.

But today, before I get caught up in preparations, there is something I must do.

No, actually, I am near my limit. So much so that I must get up and walk around now and then. If I don't do it soon.....

<Um..... hey. Could you go to the bathroom first? My tolerance is...>

"Agh!"

At this moment, if I had a drill, I wouldn't hesitate to thrust it into my own skull.

"Un...unbelievable! You super-pervert!"

<I mean, I have to suffer the same discomfort...>

"Then hurry up and leave!"

<It's because I can't that I'm here...>

"I don't need excuses! Just shut up!"

If I think about it too deeply, I will surely go crazy. To share my... urge to urinate,... such a thing!

"What have you been saying to yourself? About perverts and whatnot?"

.....oh dear. Just now I forgot myself. Because my loud voice was so piercing.....

"If it's a monodrama, it's got some pretty good editing. Only such a pervert would fall in love with Tazusa, I'm sure."

".....Youko..... why you..."

My sister, being quick to seize an opportunity, leaves in a hurry before I

explode with anger.

"That... little brat!"

<And she's 9 years old? Hard to believe.>

"I don't care if you believe it or not."

It's terrible! Truly terrible! For a nightmare, this has dragged on desperately long.

If I don't do something, my bathroom needs.....

<Ah.....>

"Nn? What now?"

<No, it was just my imagination. It's nothing.>

.....is not how it seems. From his high-pitched tone, it seemed pretty urgent. Did he see something? If so, what was it?

I look around, searching for something likely. If I discover his weakness, I might be able to smoke Pete out. If I don't hurry, I really won't be able to hold it.....

<Come on..... even if you're stubborn until the end, there's no helping it.>

"Shut up."

While I am possessed by Pete, I have to hold it in no matter what. But if I think about it, whenever I eat something, *that* comes soon after...?

In a sense, it's almost hell.

"This really sucks!"

Grabbing the tomato that had been left on the cutting board, I bite into it with all my might----

<---uegh...!>

"Nn?"

What? This incredibly agonized scream just now, like one's insides being turned inside out?

<Ah... no, it's nothing.....>

Fufu..... could it be?!

Another bite! Yet another!

<No... sto-, please stop...>

"I have it now, your weakness!"

I don't care who hears me. I shout with all my might. As if I am the princess who has discovered the single clue to defeating the evil king.

"It seems you really hate tomatoes. Hohohoho!"

<Ss... ah, uegh!>

As if trying to leave nothing but the stem, I gobble greedily.

"There's still more!"

Going to the refrigerator, I reach for the tomatoes in the vegetable box.....

"Are you thinking of becoming a performer?"

".....ah."

.....next to me is a bewildered-looking Coach Takashima.

What's more, looking on from behind him is Youko, who can't hide her confusion at seeing her blood sister's eccentricities one after another.

"That's... not it."

"Really, what is wrong?"

"That's..... I'm begging you, just leave it be for now. Any star has her worries."

I clasp my hands together, try to let my eyes sparkle like in old-school shoujo manga,..... but that doesn't work.

"Get a grip, Tazusa. If you want to go to the bathroom, just go. Why are you holding it in?"

"Actually, there's kind of a reason I can't....."

Coach unconsciously puts a hand to his forehead and sighs.

"Drinking tabasco in one go, talking to yourself, a sudden strange cry, binge eating tomatoes, refraining from going to the bathroom..... What are you

telling me to understand? Just what are they having you do in school?"

"Nothing. I'm just kind of challenging human limits..."

"Tazusa.....!"

As if running away from Coach's scolding, I dash upstairs.

If I were to allow myself to go to the bathroom in my current condition, without a doubt it would be the greatest embarrassment of my life,..... a lifetime's worth of shame.

But I've been enduring for several hours. Cursing all the water I drank during the tabasco shock, the truth is, I am already near my limit.....

The words of surrender float into my thoughts.

Entering the private room, lowering my underpants, that sensation..... would be shared---???

"No, this isn't funny!"

I shout courageously, but..... 30 minutes later.

I have no choice but to dash into the bathroom.

*

.....undoubtedly it was the biggest shock of my life.

This isn't a simple thing like peeping. It probably far surpasses NASA's most cutting-edge sense simulations. I have offered the ultimate virtual reality to some unknown Canadian boy.

"This is the worst..... really the worst---!"

I dive into my bed and bury myself in the blankets, but if I do that, it means Pete is also doing the same thing, so.....

"Where is my privacy.....? Really, I'm going to go crazy!"

Saying that, I suddenly realize something about this situation..... Unfortunately, I am no saint. Sympathizing with a pervert ghost is something I'd

rather die than do!

"Listen. If you say even a single word without my approval, you won't get away with just tabasco."

<.....I understand.>

Whenever I think of a voice echoing inside my head, I can't sleep calmly. And yet, if I move a finger, I have no privacy in even that movement. What a situation!

"Truly, human rights are precious....."

<Eh?>

"I told you not to speak!"

Anyways. I won't go to the bathroom again. Taking a bath would be absurd.if I were Shizuka-chan, I would surely be broken.

This is truly a nightmare. I don't even have an appetite. I just want to sleep as I am now. I don't know if I can fall asleep in this situation, but..... I have the feeling that falling asleep would be good for me.

...that's right.

If I sleep tonight, when I wake up in the morning, the nightmare will be over. Yes, it must be like that.

This is a bad dream.

This is surely.....

II - When It Rains... It Pours.

II - When It Rains... It Pours.[[edit](#)]

<Ah, good morning.>

.....I can't remember ever being so terrified upon awakening. Even though the night passes, it seems the nightmare has a continuation.

".....so you were also asleep?"

<More like, when you fall asleep, I also automatically.....>

.....last night, in the end, it seems I fell asleep in my sweats.

Today and tomorrow are consecutive school holidays. Though I might be possessed by a ghost, I must train.

.....first is early morning running. It's my daily routine.

A short program's 2 minutes and 40 seconds, a free program's 4 minutes. The physical strength required of a figure skater is considerable, so even though it's painful, everyone works hard at stamina training everyday. But, if you can excel at it, ultimately it makes possible high-difficulty jumps and multiple step sequences, in short, a denser program. It leads to good scores.

Soft skin like white peaches, gracefully slender limbs, and overwhelming beauty. Owing to those, I am known as Princess Tazusa.

Belying that delicate and lovely figure, I also possess an abundance of stamina. Though there's no sense in getting hung up on one's talent. Thus I can't be skipping out on running, but.....

<This morning air is quite refreshing, isn't it?>

"If only you hadn't spoken, it would be."

With that, I am running with all my might and starting to breathe hard. I realize it, but..... If I think about it, the fatigue is shared.

"You're like some new species of parasite. Shall I take you to some scientific society?"

I know that however I sharpen the edge of my verbal abuse nothing will change, but I guess this is also my personality. Since yesterday, depending on how you count, I've easily spoken more than several hundred insults, and I run my usual course while continually adding more.

A pleasant sweat begins to cover my entire body. But, at the moment I realize a certain truth....., it suddenly changes into a damp, cold sweat.

Sweat is bad. Later, it will be really bad. But I can't just not train.....

"I can't take it! This is a living hell!"

<.....what is this all of a sudden? Try putting yourself in my position a little...>

"What did you say? Whose fault is it that I can't take a bath?!"

.....I did it again. The elderly runner passing by me looks over in surprise.

<You're on track to get reported to [119](#).>

Before yelling at Pete, let's look both ways, and front and back, and make sure there's no one there.....

In an instant I come up with this motto, and etch it in my mind.

"Yes indeed. While I'm at it, shall I have you removed by a brain surgeon or something?"

<It's impossible. It will just damage your memories or something...>

"If you stay for 100 days, my mind will surely collapse anyway!"

.....from the roadside trees nearby, a flock of crows noisily take flight.

*

Usually in figure skating, you make one short program and one free (long) program per season.

In 2004, the world-famous Russian coach Evgenia Gilcleft stated that she

would like to create a program for Sakurano Tazusa, Japan's newly minted star who had proven her value by ascending the podium in the junior championships.

Coming just as I was stepping up from junior to senior, catching the eye of a famous coach like her had a big effect.

Both Coach Takashima and I were very interested, leaving to Gilcleft the free program, and during summer break we flew to Russia so I could be coached down to the tiniest gestures. And then.

The program to J. Strauss II's waltz received high marks from the judges. In the Japan Championships, on which was riding the two tickets to the 2005 World Championships, I was defeated by Japanese champion Shitou Kyouko, but I made it to 2nd place and achieved my goal.

However, just before the event, Shitou's injury was discovered. In a rush, the alternate skater stepped onto the stage of the World Championships, but both her preparation and skill were lacking, and she dropped out in the preliminary round.

Then there was I, making my debut. Though my results in the preliminary round had been so-so, I was extremely nervous during the short program, falling twice and dropping a significant number of places. Nor was I able to make a recovery during the free, ultimately ending up a disappointing 17th place.

The proven talent Shitou, who had made it to 6th pace in the 2004 World Championships, and young Sakurano, whose improvements were remarkable. The Japan Skating Federation's prediction was that, with the efforts of us two the number of representative spots for next year's Olympics would expand to 3, but with Shitou's injury that became impossible.

Even by myself, if I had made it into the top 10, we would have kept our 2 spots. The shock of not even achieving our bottommost target was, unsurprisingly, large.....

And then, the awaited Olympic season.

The one remaining representative spot in women's singles is contested, centering on two people: the beautiful and popular Shitou Kyouko, and the even more beautiful Sakurano Tazusa, me----

Anyway, that is how the current situation developed.

Actually, even though I am skating Gilcleft's program again, I definitely was not feeling optimistic. Maybe because she had overestimated my genius, I thought the level she required was too high for me. But with Coach Takashima's and Director Mishiro's persuasion, I grudgingly consent. In addition, this season, we've decided to go with Gilcleft creations for both short and free.....and as expected, I have yet to master these difficult programs.

At a time when I am seriously starting to panic, to be possessed by a pervert-like Canadian.....

*

At my rink, I am the only one who has even the chance of making it to the Olympics that are 3 months hence.

Everyone, beginning with Coach Takashima and Mika, is mindful of me and removes any unnecessary pressure. Even Youko has taken basically that attitude. But.....

Sometimes, there comes someone to disturb that peacefulness.

"Sakurano-san. Have you cleared the challenge from last time?"

.....age: mid-fifties. Nicknamed "[Sarcastic the Third](#)", she is the Figure Skating Federation's Department Chief, General Director Mishiro Yukie.

She has the most authority with respect to selecting the representative, and in order to observe potential candidates, *i.e.* in order to see me, she occasionally makes her way to Crystal Garden.to be honest, she's a smoky, shady middle-aged lady.

She covers her slim 170cm figure with name brands. Her thickly applied cream and eyeshadow are probably also quite famous, but they are nowhere near enough to transform her sallow, past-its-prime face. Though she might not be beyond saving if she did something about her thin gold-rimmed glasses.

"Yes, don't worry. I will show you now."

Seeing me turn belligerent so quickly, Coach Takashima looks uneasy.
.....though this is typical.

Sending a glance intended to slightly provoke, I show her the skating sequence for which, after last time's competition, the director presented me with sarcasm-laden advice. In the middle of this season's program, just during the part where I gracefully show off in front of the judges, it would be bad if I scraped the ice strangely and made a grinding sound.

You may not be able to guess from my whole-bodied floating elegance,..... but as part of my personality, I hate losing. After being told I suck, I didn't quietly withdraw but rather practiced with all my might.

"It seems to have improved a bit. Perhaps just barely at the level where the judges can watch without being bored."

"Why thank you."

Of course, this stinking old hag... that is, the director, understands full well my personality, which is why she dangles such sarcasm in front of me.

"Then again, your expression is entirely rigid as usual. Watching you skate, I mistake you for a Buddhist statue or something and feel the urge to pray. Though your personality is terrible you somehow have a pretty face, so how about smiling a little more?"

.....in response to the director's increasingly vicious sarcasm, I feel my cheek begin to twitch. Why am I surrounded by so many unpleasant people?

"By the way, it seems you have been referring to me as 'sarcasm the third' or something like that....."

.....who? Who gave me away?

"Since I'm here, I'll take the liberty of responding. How about 'plaster mask'? When I was young, something similar was quite popular."

.....I try to press my lips together into a flat line, but even I know that it its twitching. A forced smile is about my limit.

"In any event. Even among judges, there is no one who will award points to a

sour-faced Oriental. As it stands now, your chances of being chosen as representative are exceedingly low. Though I wouldn't mind being spared the trouble of making a decision."

".....I understand."

Putting aside the vector of my emotions, I can't but recognize that the director has a point.

"Takashima-san. Please take it upon yourself to speak to her as well. It would be a great loss otherwise."

Director Mishiro shifts her gaze from me and my discouragement to Coach. Really, I have to be grateful.

"Yes, of course..... I am always telling her."

"I am counting on you, truly."

After boiling my insides more than usual, Sarcasm the Third leaves the rink.

"That old hag! Who is she calling plaster!"

"The director is entirely correct. You have the skills, so unless you smile it is a loss.but, I suppose I've already told you many times."

".....I get it, I get it."

Yes. I get it in my mind. In order to compete on the world stage, it won't fly to say it's because I'm shy.

<Is there some reason?>

"Shut up."

.....if I could naturally burst into a big smile, how nice it would be. But that is probably a stunt I will never be capable of.

*

Unable to stop it, I dash to the bathroom a second time, but if I have to do the

other thing again----

That kind of unprecedeted despair and fear is driving me to actions that defy understanding.

For vampires, garlic.

For Pete, tomatoes.

.....but I was foolish. Going on a buying spree, without thinking of the refrigerator's capacity. Placing before me the more than 84 tomatoes I bought at the supermarket, I am really at a loss.....

"Hey. Are you giving up skating and switching to eating contests?"

I am spotted by an annoying one.

"No. It's for nutritional balance..."

"Piling tomatoes mountain-high, how is this 'balance'?"

.....too true. Suddenly I can't speak.

"I understand buying up toilet paper during the oil shock, but what kind of shock are tomatoes for?"

.....I'm being told off by a third grader in elementary school. It's quite unsightly, and where did she learn that kind of thing in the first place?

"Lately, you've really been acting as if a screw in your head is loose. Could it be..."

"I was thinking I'd like to eat a lot of tomatoes, so I bought them. Is that so bad?"



.....what an unproductive dialogue. But it is overwhelmingly painful.

"They'll go bad before you can finish eating..."

"It'll be fine! I'll eat them all!"

Really, everything sucks!

For the moment, I grab a tomato in each hand and, ignoring the screams echoing inside my head, bite into them.

.....I ate 12 tomatoes in one go, but it is not enough to get rid of evil spirit Pete.

For things like gymnastic, rhythmic gymnastics, and figure skating, daily restraint and control of body weight is a most important matter. Therefore, ruining one's diet is a development anyone would want to avoid.....

Moreover, I haven't changed my underwear since yesterday. I washed my face and hair in the sink and brushed my teeth, but..... I couldn't wash or brush away the built up stress.

<.....um. It may be my imagination, but I feel itchy.>

"I won't step into a bath, even in hell."

I recognize the reality that dark clouds hover over the probability of my

expelling Pete, but.....

<You'll just cause dirt to stick...>

"You're the one who's sticking!"

<That's mean!>

.....the catch in his accent conveys the depth of his anguish.

<Can't you wear a swimsuit?>

For a moment..... my heart moves, but that just makes me all the more stubborn.

"Why should I have to!"

<No really, I am thinking of you...>

"I see your intentions clear as day! Even if maggots hatch, I absolutely won't show you!"

Yes. If it came to a swimsuit, it would be like... bare skin.....

Like I could do it, even in hell!

However, as I pass the second night full of worry, the best of the plans I desperately come up with..... is to take sleeping pills and have someone wash my body for me while I am deeply asleep.

But Coach Takashima is a man,..... and there's no way I could explain, and if we're not careful, Coach could get arrested for indecent behavior. More importantly, no idiot would put such a plan into practice.

"Ahh, when will this hell end..."

*

Day 3.

With the aftereffects of eating all those raw tomatoes yesterday, the worst possible scenario is beginning acquire the taste of reality.

As if heartless, my abdomen begins to swell. Of course, its contents drive my thoughts toward a yet unseen world, and I'm not talking about pure, innocently smiling angels, either.....

On the surface, I show untiring tenacity, but instinctively I am beginning to give up. Even a dozen tomatoes were not enough to exterminate the evil spirit known as Pete Pumps.

In that case, I need to be prepared for the X-Day that will come----

"No.....! I believe in miracles."

<There was never a chance of that in the first place...>

"This is a once in a lifetime thing! It's a humiliation with a legacy the world over! With a guy like you who has zero delicacy, my..."

I suddenly stop.

"Really! Rather than *that*, if I could just excrete *you* out, how nice that would be!"

<Wha.....!>

Exploding from that response, an insult beyond my own imagining..... even Pete is speechless.

Even / think it was a mean thing to say, but I can't deny that it improved my spirits.....

<What a person! Really, what a person you are!>

What I sense from that voice is complete scorn. I start to reconsider.....

<Someone like you will be single all your life, no mistake! You treacherous, spiteful, ill-natured maggot-woman! You're the world's biggest bitch!>

".....what, did you say?!"

The fangs of self-reflection instantly vanish, and the superseding anger.....

Lead me to a life-or-death decision----

"I'll make a boiled octopus out of you!"

My destination is, the bathroom.

*

".....ah."

.....could this be, that world?

I see a field of flowers.....

"Tazusa?"

.....ahh, it seems it was the pattern on my comforter.

"Tazusa, are you awake now?"

".....I guess I'm alive."

I'm lying on my bed. Next to me are Coach Takashima and my sister. Before my eyes, that is, on the ceiling, is a poster of a straw-hatted comic hero that I like.

<.....you big idiot.>

At that voice echoing in my head..... I can't help but heave a resigned sigh.

If I heat myself to the point of passing out, I might chase this guy out. So thinking, I soaked in 46°C hot water for a long time..... but, in the end, it seems it had no effect.

I held on until I thought I would die, but..... ah, the heartlessness of it all.

"Tazusa. It's alright. Just rest and don't worry about anything."

Turning my gaze back, on Coach's face I see..... the tolerant smile of a teacher who is sure that he has grasped the troubles of his student.

.....for a second time, I take a deep breath.

"Let me say this."

"It's alright, so..."

"Be quiet and listen."

.....perhaps because all the blood rushed to my head, my speech is frustratingly inarticulate. Even as I am fed up at the idiocy of having to

repeatedly explain that I am sane, I cut Coach off with both hands.

For me, Sakurano Tazusa, to be thought of as the skater who mentally snapped because of Olympics pretensions. That alone I cannot abide.

"All of my words and actions these past 2, 3 days have a reason. I can't explain right now, but I will someday. Coach, you will absolutely come to understand. I am completely normal."

"Though I don't think there's anything normal or silver about boiling yourself in the bathroom of the peaceful Takashima house." (!)

...well, I didn't particularly think I needed this brat worrying about me...

"And in your school swimsuit, too. Well, from a normal person's perspective of wanting to hide her scrawny, washboard-like body, I guess you've grown up a little..."

"Now, Youko."

Since my usual energy has evaporated, it is Coach who ends up reining her in.

"So, what then? Are you saying that your perfect example of eccentric behavior just now has a logical reason behind it?"

"Yes."

.....Coach presses his face up to my nose.

"Now listen, Tazusa. With mental illnesses, self-awareness of symptoms..."

"Coach!"

Fiercely raising my listless body, I put strength into my voice.

"See here. Whether it be the Olympics or something else, the great Tazusa would never lose to the pressure. You should know that."

.....if this were a drama, at this point the main theme would play, and even Coach would give in, that's how it would develop.

I had thought those words would be a trump card, as it were, but it seems I was mistaken. It takes a full 2 hours after this to shake off Coach's questioning. Moreover, I am ordered to rest in bed until tomorrow.

*

Day 4 of being possessed by Pete.

Finally able to mostly ignore the churning in my abdomen, I sit at the breakfast table and consult the morning paper. There, in part of the sports column, I see familiar names.

Figure skating, Director Mishiro, Shitou Kyouko, and, myself, Sakurano Tazusa.

---Concerning the prospects of Shitou and Sakurano, the two of whom are battling to be the women's figure skating singles representative at the Turin Olympics: the federation's director, Ms. Mishiro, is of the opinion that, if a difference between the two skaters becomes apparent by the end of the Grand Prix Series, they may tentatively select a representative without waiting until the National Championships---is what it says.

The Grand Prix Series consists of a total of 6 competitions.

For me, Skate America and the NHK Trophy which is held in Japan. Shitou will appear in the German competition and also the NHK Trophy.

In each competition, skaters are awarded points in order starting from first place. At the end of the 6 competitions, the 6 people who have the most points have the right to participate in the competition known as the Grand Prix Final.

But I completely lost during Skate America, receiving 0 points. Even if I win the NHK Trophy, I have basically no hope of making it to the Final. In contrast, Shitou has already twice in the past made to this gathering of the world's top 6. And it seems well within the realm of possibility this time, too.....

Guessing from how quite a bit of space is devoted to Director Mishiro's statements, my and Shitou Kyouko's battle must be a hotter topic than I imagined.

I hear quiet footsteps descending the stairs.....

"Good morning, idiot elder sister."

My cheeky brat of a 9 year old sister sits down across from me, still rubbing her eyes.

"Good morning, Youko-chan. Are you picking a fight this early in the morning?"

<Ahh, how beautiful is sisterly love.>

.....since yesterday, I have entered a cold war situation with this perverted ghost. But if I yell at him here, Coach and Youko will say things again.

<But then, since her blood sister is such a strange, simple-minded person, I can sympathize...>

"---ta (x2)!"

I shriek repeatedly.

I'd intentionally hit my kneecap against the corner of the table with all my might. In order to shut this ghost up.

After overcoming the pain, before my eyes are Youko and Coach exchanging glances. In particular, my sister looks at me while raising both palms, shaking her head sadly, and shrugging her shoulders.what a skillful child.

<That hurt!>

The protest echoes in my head, but with no indication he'll take back calling me simple-minded..... one more blow!

"Ai (x2)!"

The pain this time brings tears to my eyes, but Pete's moan soothes me.....

<Get a grip! You sh*t tank woman!>

"---gh!"

Just now, what did he.....?

My eyes roll from the shock.

".....what tank...?"

<It seems at least your volume is big...>

"Sh*t tank woman, is it----?!"

Due to my rage, my fists rattle the dishes on the table as I leap to my feet. The chair I send flying with my behind topples over.....

"I'll kill you...! I'll crush you!"

Youko, who's facing me, cowers in fear and clings to Coach. Passing by them, I savagely open the refrigerator door----

"Don't stop me! Coach!"

"Please stop, Tazusa! If you want to enter an eating competition, I'll let you!"

"Let me do thisssssss---!"

.....Coach's desperate restraining controlled the spasms of a tomato-poisoning patient.

That's what I heard afterwards.

*

By the time I arrive home from school, my intestines are suffering from unheard-of pressure.

Since that nightmare, my dignity has been destroyed time and time again by this vulgar ghost. The final door is just barely sealed by the stubbornness of my guardian deity.

But, when this is released, there's no guarantee I won't crumble such that not even a millimeter-sized fragment is left.

"Uugh...!"

I feel a pressure in my abdomen, accompanied by a tiny amount of heat, and I unconsciously stagger. If I were to count, it'd be just about 5 days. During which I've held back all solid waste. It certainly breaks my previous lifetime record by a lot. The problem is..... this is still ongoing!

I've never in my life experienced constipation like this. Of course. My beautiful

self----

<Ow...!>

This time it's the pervert-ghost in my head who's groaning.

I suddenly want to cry. I've long gone beyond what's pitiful.

"I can't take this anymore..... kwah...!"

I press my stomach with both hands. Or should I say, I calm it.

<I beg you, Tazusa! I'm at my limit!>

"Why are you at *your* limit?! Besides, I've told you countless times..."

<Beauties do not cr*p. I got it! I got it, so please get to the bathroom!>

"For what purpose?"

<Isn't it obvious! To cr*p!>

.....it seems he's having trouble even smoothing over the illogicality. At least I've managed to share with Pete this sense of being on the verge of breakdown.

Moreover.

<Ahh, come on. No more.....>

"Perchance did you eat something bad or something?"

Though I wouldn't know. It seems some urgent phenomenon is occurring.....

"Uugh, wah wah!"

.....a 5-car Siberian super-express train!

Impossible, absolutely impossible! Whatever barricade is put up, it can't stop me.

<Oi, plea-.... ah, I'm done for!>

Both feet pounding the floor, I make a dash.

"What is it? What is my idiot sister up to this time?"

Youko sticks her head out of her bedroom doorway, but..... seeing her agitated sister with a forehead covered in sweat, even Youko is rendered speechless.

While knowing the consequences, I convert the last of my resistance into energy, and..... finally.

Having broken through the best of my resistance, I act on a lady's instinctive modesty and grab the MD Walkman on my desk, put on the headphones, and set it to full volume. Shoving aside the dumbfounded Youko, I dash from my room and dive into the bathroom with godlike speed, pulling down my underwear at the same time.

I abandon myself to the magnificent strains of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, 4th movement, the Ode to Joy.

I release it all----

*

".....this is the worst."

.....once I realize that muttering is my own, I put it a little more strength and give voice to it again.

"Really the worst. All of this....."

It seems I'm still normal. Suddenly acquiring aphasia from the shock..... not even anything like that.

Only, even though the performance is long over, I have forgotten to take off my headphones, and I remain seated, half-dazed, on the toilet.

Although the accumulation of about 5 days is now on the other side, the cruel memories are not washed away.

I shake my head 2, 3 times and nonchalantly stand up. Since the moment of breakdown, easily 15 minutes have passed.

<Um.....>

As if addressing a sleeping tyrant, Pete cautiously breaks in.

"What now?"

<Just... I was wondering, is it alright not to put on your underwear...>

"---gh!"

.....suddenly enraged, I head straight for the refrigerator. I fill my stomach with tomatoes.

Translator's Notes and References

Prologue[edit]

FSSSSHHH SSSH!!!!NNNGGGGGG

In the darkness, the white-blue shining tip of the blade slashed through the monster, burning away its outer shell.

GRRAAAAH! SPLORGHHH

The monster moaned, but only for an instant. It swung its serrated, scythe-shaped claw towards us at full speed!

“Heh...”

I quickly dodged the attack. The claw slashed through the air, crushing the asphalt and creating a huge hole in the ground.

I am tired... but I make sure not to show it. I keep my distance from the monster and my eyes focused on the prey. Inside my hand is a metallic cylinder-shaped handle, and coming out of it is a shining blade, creating rays of blue and white light.

“GIII... GIIGIGIII!!!”

I point my ‘Laser Blade’ at the monster who is taking its time pulling its claw out of the crushed asphalt. Its head resembles an upside-down triangle, with multiple eyes on each side of its face. It glared at me. The wound I gave it must have made it angrier, as it was gritting its jaws so hard that I could hear it clearly. The monster turned its disgusting body to face me, its 4 legs coming out of its torso allowing it to stand up.

Illuminated by the lights of the neon signs, this monster, if you describe it as a normal insect, is closest to a praying mantis. Although, calling it a ‘praying mantis’ when it’s over 3 meters tall is a bit of a stretch.

“A small praying mantis is scary enough, but this isn’t fair!”

I remember watching the scene of a praying mantis feast when I was a kid. Just

like how the grasshopper got devoured, will I have my body ripped apart piece by piece by this monster? You are kidding me! This has got to be a joke!

“__GI!!!”

Suddenly the monster lunged forward! The gigantic figure covered the distance within seconds. It was fast! Even if I back away, it will still catch up to me. All I can do is stay and fight... Can I do it?!

“GIGUIII~!!!”

The monster jumped with no wasteful movements and lashed out at me with its deadly claws! I managed to avoid a direct hit, but there was a burning pain in my left shoulder. The serrated, scythe-like claws must have ripped into my flesh. No matter! Without hesitation, I kicked off the ground and launched myself straight at the monster. Gripping my Laser Blade tightly...

“Hiyaaaah!!!”

I stabbed the monster in it's torso, landing a deadly blow!

“Gi...Giyuuuuu!”

The monster let out an ear-splitting screech. I thrust the shining blade deeper into its chest cavity. The dying noises were just as bad as the smell that came from its burning insides.

“a...Haa... haa... haa...”

It seems this shall be my victory. Now to make this screeching to stop. I pushed the blade in up to the hilt.

“Ga!”

As soon as the monster noticed the drop in my guard, it quickly got its claw hooked in the back of my leg.

“Arghh!”

With the claw firmly embedded, it gave a strong jerk. Losing grip of the sword, I started to plummet towards the ground. Unfortunately for me, the monster's other claw was waiting for me! I was suddenly impaled and lifted into the air. I already stabbed it! I stabbed its chest already with my own two hands! Why is it

still moving? Why, why is it still alive?! How much vitality does this creature have? This isn't fair!

"Guh... Puh...!"

I spat out some blood... The stomach acid tasted sour and burned my throat. The smell of my escaping internal organs and blood mixed together to make my nostrils go numb.

"You... Get... Get off me!"

The praying mantis's 'feast' had started. Its scythe-like claws and sharp fangs were only used for dismembering its prey. The larger jaws were chattering away, while the smaller jaws were preparing to eat. As if I were some French dish, it started to cut the meat into pieces and place them into its mouth.

"u..chi...gachi...guchu..."

Without even taking a break, it kept feasting off of me. I think I'm gonna go crazy. Being eaten alive... This is torture!!! I shook my blood filled thoughts away and tried to reach the Laser Blade that was lying uselessly on the ground. But, as I watched blood slowly flow down my arm, I realized it was just out of reach.

"Argh... Arghhhhhhhh!!!"

Extreme pain ran across my entire body, and I started to lose my grip on consciousness. What was that...!? I didn't want to watch a praying mantis monster happily chewing apart my body... And, I sensed that it was about to reach my 'vital' parts... This is bad! Any more and I was going to be killed! I didn't want to die like this! But, I couldn't do anything about it... It had completely disabled my movement...

"Ju!... Gijigiji..."

Ouch! No! It hurts! No! It hurts it hurts it hurts!!!

"Arghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

---*BANG!!!*

The sound echoed the area. In an instant, its entire body has been smashed by something rock-hard. And the pain that has been killing me has reduced down.

“Giuuuuuuuuuuu!”

The monster screeches. The half-closed eyelids have now completely opened up, and if I look at it even with my blurred sight, I see a praying mantis jumping and screaming and rolling around like crazy. The stomach area and below had been blown off.

I think ‘back-up’ has finally arrived. I have been released by the monster, and had been dropped to the ground.

“Guh... Cough...! Heh...”

Then something pops in my head. I swallow all the blood whirling in my mouth, stretch my hand to reach, and grab the toy blade.

Despite my shaking body, I stand up, but I’m wobbling unbalanced. Then I focus my mind onto the ‘toy blade’, and the plastic object turns into a sharp metallic blade. The object starts to shine blue and white. This isn’t enough! I must put in more energy!

“Woooooooooooooooooooooo!”

I focus even more. I use all my willpower and sharpen my consciousness. The lighting blade shines stronger, and starts to become gold. All the power causes the air around me to mix in and creates many explosive noises!

The praying mantis, having half its body blown off, is still crawling around using its scythe-like arms and is trying to get up. It did well for an insect, I can say I’m impressed. But...

“It’s over now!”

I dived to the praying mantis! But that moment I felt the biggest pain come back right into my entire body... But, that doesn’t matter! As if drawing a semicircle, I swing down my blade right in front of me...

“Gi...”

The praying mantis head flies off! My blade keeps cutting through and chops its arms off. The monster's body, without a base, drops to the ground. I, so exhausted myself, fall to the ground also.

“I... I beat it...”

I was panting really hard, panting really fast without a break. The dry ground absorbs all of the blood streaming out of my body. It's okay that I defeated that monster, but at this rate, I'm gonna die... Well, at least it's a lot better than being eaten alive by a praying mantis...

"Sakuya!!!"

My mind, which was floating away, quickly came back because of that loud voice calling me.

"Sakuya! Are you alright? Sakuya!" A girl in school uniform speaks to me. This girl, who is usually aggressive, is unusually caring towards me. She is leaning over me. In the girl's hand is a Hand Gun. That is what saved my life.

"! You have a terrible wound..."

The girl, not worrying about the blood staining her clothes, puts her gun on the ground and leans over my head.

"Akeno..."

My voice which mumbled the girl's voice was a lot worse than I thought.

"Thanks for that. You saved my life. Are you okay yourself, Akeno? Have you received any wounds?"

"You should worry about yourself, not me! Sakuya... What should we do? This terrible wound..."

"It's okay, this is just a dream, just a nightmare... I won't die, probably..."

"'Probably' isn't good enough! If you die, who's going to protect me!?"

She frowns at me. I'm glad, because it's just like Akeno to add extra irrelevant words into everything she says. Even if her voice is trembling and tears are running down her eyes.

"W... Why are you smiling? I'm seriously worried about you!"

"I know... I am glad that you're worried about me, but..."

"But... What?"

"You're usually tsun-tsun (snobbish) so... Your worried face is cute... Kinda..."

"Wha-"

Akeno looked surprised, and maybe in another situation she would've blushed... I think I just did a confusing thing.

"You... You idiot! Even if you compliment me like that I'm not happy! You have a bad personality!"

"May... Arghh*cough*!"

"Sa-Sakuya!?"

I coughed blood out again. I've lost so much blood already... There's still more!? I think I've lost too much... Thanks to that I don't have any blood left in the edges of my body... So I don't feel anything on my fingers and even my head... It feels weird... If I realize the pain has gone too...

"Just wait a sec... I'll give you treatment!"

"Yes... Please..."

I'm becoming tired and sleepy, I can't keep my eyes open and I'm getting so tired it's hard for me to even talk.

"Let... Let me rest... o... ra..."

"No! You can't sleep! Open your eyes! Please!"

Akeno's voice starts to fade away. I can tell she's shaking my body. But... Give me a break... I'm so tired... I really need to sleep... It... It feels really good like this...

"G...Night...Ake...o..."

I just managed to say that sentence, and then I rested my body into a deep, deep sleep.